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SUCCESS STORY

Women's Handicrafts Hit World Market

Director gains contacts, knowledge from USAID exchange program visit



Photo: Amer. Council for Int'l Educ/B. Jakypova

Svetkul Akmatova (center, in the traditional blue Kyrgyz jacket) and members of her organization, Altyn Kol, busily prepare wool for their handmade carpets.

Participating in the exchange program gave Svetkul Akmatova more knowledge of modern international marketing, and Altyn Kol more opportunities to offer their products to clients in the United States and abroad.

Svetkul Akmatova, who participated in a USAID exchange program, is one of the program's most successful alumni in Kyrgyzstan. Svetkul visited Ohio in November 2006 as part of a delegation involved with handicrafts in small business.

Currently, she is the director of Altyn Kol ("Golden Arms") Women's Handicrafts, a non-governmental organization in the Naryn Region village of Kochkor specializing in "shyrdak" and "ala-kiyiz", both traditional, Kyrgyz handmade felt carpets.

Svetkul and her organization benefited significantly from the visit. For example, Svetkul learned how to organize effective fairs and exhibitions, and create networks between clients and foreign partners on the international level. Altyn Kol's products have been displayed and sold in Ohio and New Mexico, and at the Swiss International Handicrafts Fairs. The organization also created a Web site where clients worldwide can see Altyn Kol's products. Since her visit, the yearly income of the small organization has increased from 1.4 million som (approximately \$40,500) up to 2 million som (about \$57,800).

Another important success that Svetkul achieved after participating in the program is winning grants from different international donor organizations, such as one that gave her the chance to build a feltcrafts workshop that provides the association extra income.

Svetkul has ambitious plans for the future. She wants to participate in other countries' fairs and exhibitions, enhance the links with United States and other countries, improve the quality of the products, and enlarge her organization's business. Participating in the exchange program gave Svetkul more knowledge of modern international marketing, and Altyn Kol more opportunities to offer their products to clients in the United States and abroad.